

## SECTION 3

# The Disciplines and the Classroom

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## 8

### Hopeful teacher education in South Africa: towards a politics of humanity

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#### **Introduction: Post-apartheid teacher education**

In this chapter I offer an account of Nussbaum's politics of humanity to show how teacher education programmes can be remedied as the country's universities endeavour to address the poor quality of teacher education programmes. Since the demise of apartheid education, the development of policy in relation to teacher education in South Africa has undergone major adjustments, and yet credible change in teacher education remains elusive. By far the most prominent conceptual and pragmatic change to which teacher education has been subjected points towards the cultivation of teachers who can enact their professions as democratic citizens. This implies that teachers ought to engender in learners a spirit of democratic citizenry that can imbue in them the virtues of dialogical engagement, connecting caringly with the other, and performing their tasks in a responsible manner. So it happens that current policy on teacher education accentuates the 'roles' of teachers in a post-apartheid dispensation along the lines of such democratic virtues.

I do not wish to restate the extensive amount of writing about teacher education by internationally renowned South African education theorists such as Shirley Pendlebury and Penny Enslin, but rather to imagine what Nussbaum's 'politics of humanity' (2004) has to offer teacher education in South Africa. I want to explore what it means to be a teacher who does not practise disgust and shame and their implications for humane learning. In this way, I hope to

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extend the calling of a teacher beyond the confines of democratic citizenship towards an understanding of teacher education that resonates with a politics of humanity. If universities intend to contribute seriously to hopeful teacher education, their programmes have to be aligned with what it means to cultivate humanity.

More than a decade ago, two central – and connected – features of the Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2000) were the seven roles teachers (educators) were supposed to perform and the competences they had to display for assessment and qualification purposes. The following seven roles are closely reminiscent of those in the Norms and Standards for Educators:

- learning mediator
- interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials
- leader, administrator and manager
- scholar, researcher and lifelong learner
- community, citizenship and pastoral role
- assessor
- learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist.

Teachers are expected to perform these roles as part of their contribution to the reconstruction project of South African society (Pendlebury, 1998:33). Each role is constituted by the following three competences: practical competence, foundational competence and reflexive competence. ‘The seven roles and associated competences for educators for schooling provide the exit level outcomes. They are in effect the norms for educator development and therefore the central feature of all initial educator qualifications and learning programmes’ (Department of Education, 2000:12). In the role of interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, an educator (teacher) is supposed to ‘understand and interpret provided learning programmes, design original learning programmes, identify the requirements for a specific context of learning and select and prepare suitable textual and visual resources for learning’ (Department of Education, 2000:13). Whether teachers were actually equipped to do so, however, remains a question for debate.

Another criticism of the Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2000:10) relates to the expectation that teachers ought to be reflective practitioners. Given many pedagogical practices, including the standard format for examination question papers in many subjects which fostered the habits of ‘teaching to the exam’ and rote learning of textbook

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summaries, lecture notes and model answers (Pendlebury, 1998:337), this has not always been achievable. The Norms and Standards for Educators have always been silent on how the competences, and the 'flexibility of mind' to apply these competences, should be developed in student teachers and in-service teachers. The latter policy document only states that all 'the competences must be developed in all initial educator qualifications ... They may be developed in different ways, with different emphases and at different depths. Providers have the responsibility to decide how this should be achieved...' (Department of Education, 2000:11).

This absence of clear guidelines perpetuated the status quo and hindered the transformation of South African teacher education. Clear guidelines were necessary since many South African teachers in the apartheid era, and perhaps still, were subjected to rote learning of teaching methods while studying at the Department of Education and Training (DET) and other colleges (Pendlebury, 1998:344). These colleges stressed subject facts at the expense of 'principled knowledge and the development of critical discernment and independent judgement' (Pendlebury, 1998:337). This situation, in turn, always required that teachers be 're-educated' to become reflective practitioners, since change did not happen automatically.

It is now common knowledge amongst the vast majority of South African educators in schools and universities that the country's institutions ought to be committed to the cultivation of democratic citizens – specifically, teachers and learners who can act as democratic citizens. A democratic citizen embraces the virtues of listening, talking, reaching consensus, disagreement and critical engagement, and simultaneously extends their responsibility towards society. Likewise, a democratic teacher is a critical-reflective practitioner who seeks to cultivate social justice through pedagogical actions (Samuel, 2010:5).

In a recent study, Arends and Phurutse (2009:43-5) found that 'beginner' teachers in South Africa 'are thrust into classrooms without the necessary support and mentorship'; their [teachers'] expanded roles involve 'more administrative duties instead of increased instructional time'; and school managers 'may not be critical and reflective enough about their staff and this poses serious challenges to school improvement initiatives', such as 'schools located in economically depressed areas ... [producing] poor results'. Most disconcerting about their findings, however, is that 'violence is increasing both inside and outside of schools,' making it practically impossible for beginner teachers to cope:

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In South Africa, many learners are also exposed to, or are themselves victims of, physical and sexual abuse, extreme poverty and HIV/AIDS. As a result of HIV/AIDS some young learners become heads of households. It is in such situations that teachers feel inadequate as effective educators, as the classroom and school situation demands more of them than teacher training prepared them for. (Arends and Phurutse, 2009:44)

With the aforementioned in mind the Council on Higher Education (CHE) produced the Report on the National Review of Academic and Professional Programmes in Education in 2010. This highlights some of the biggest problems facing teacher education in the country: the poor quality of teacher education programmes; the fact that teacher education programmes are not cost-effective; and the fact that policies for the supply, utilisation and development of teachers are driven by the wrong incentives (Council on Higher Education, 2010:11). One of the fundamental weaknesses identified in the teacher education programmes relates to the inappropriate blend of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and the incapacity of teachers to manage learning in diverse social and educational contexts (Council on Higher Education, 2010:102). And, if initial teacher education programmes do not sufficiently produce teachers who can integrate different forms of knowledge as well as manage diverse learning situations, it seems highly unlikely that teachers who can deal with the challenges faced by teacher education, in particular the issue of violence in and beyond the school, will be produced.

What I found unhelpful about the National Review of Academic and Professional Programmes in Education is its failure to pinpoint the conceptual problems relating to the teacher education offered by South African universities. It is simply not enough to claim that teacher education programmes lack integration between theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge. It is also very vague to argue that there seems to be a lack of theory in the programme offerings. One can include more theory in teacher education programmes, but if it does not contribute towards reducing violence in and beyond the school environment then this theory would be of little use. The argument is that integrating theory into a teacher education programme should effect pragmatic change, such as combating different forms of violence. Neither would an argument for enhancing the relevance of programmes be meaningful if such relevance remained disconnected from producing teachers who are adept at negotiating issues of social justice in and beyond the school classroom. It is in this regard that Nussbaum's 'politics of humanity' has much to offer.

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**Towards a politics of humanity**

My reading of Nussbaum's *Hiding from Humanity: disgust, shame, and the law* suggests that a politics of humanity is constituted by at least two acts of being human: not to act with disgust and not to bring shame. Disgust and shame can undermine the quest to be human. The 'core idea of disgust is that of contamination to the self; the emotion expresses a rejection of a possible contaminant' considered as a pollutant to the human (Nussbaum, 2004:99). And to express disgust at someone or something is to suggest that someone or something deserves one's revulsion or repudiation, because the human self reacts to stimuli that (s)he finds offensive (Nussbaum, 2004:87). Nussbaum explains disgust as follows:

My own experience of moralized disgust takes the following form. When my politics proves too gross and vile, I imagine, and sometimes seriously entertain, the thought of moving to Finland, a nation ... I imagine ... as a land of clear blue lakes and unsullied forests, and, at the same time, as a land of social democratic virtue, unsullied by greed, aggression, and corruption. In short, my fantasy is an escape fantasy, having more to do with back-formation from current discontents than with constructive engagement with Finnish society. Anger at US politicians tends in the direction of protest and constructive engagement. Disgust at US politicians leads to escape and disengagement. (2004:105-6)

Nussbaum's point is that if one shows disgust, one becomes discontented with and disengaged from others in society; that is, disgust rules out the possibility of 'constructive engagement' because 'its core idea of contamination basically wants the person out of sight' (2004:106). So if a person feels disgust at racism, sexism, gender inequality, homophobia and xenophobia, the person considers such acts by people as offensive and repulsive and wants to disengage from such acts. A politics of humanity does not entertain the idea of disgust in this sense: people should not escape the realities of untenable human relations primarily because escaping such acts would result in further marginalisation and victimisation of those whom one might consider as worthy of rejection and alienation. For instance, showing disgust at bigots would not necessarily resolve the problem of bigotry, because one disengages from something that one is discontented with. However, showing anger at the situation without turning one's back on remedying the societal ill that causes it proves to be far more undignified since one does not tackle the problem head on. To show disgust at school violence would not address the situation at all. It would be better to engage with the issues that undermine school discipline, as turning one's back would merely exacerbate abuse and anger at

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school. Thus acting without disgust would give one a real chance to remedy an unsatisfactory situation – a matter of embarking on a politics of humanity.

A politics of humanity demands that people engage with others as human beings, without showing discontent with, disengagement from and revulsion towards situations or people they dislike; doing the latter would, in turn, lead to further alienation and victimisation of people in society. If teachers do not attend to bullying in schools, bullies would merely be marginalised and excluded, without such unbecoming human behaviour being remedied. In essence, to practise disgust is to hide from humanity because one excludes oneself from the problems that beset society.

Secondly, shame is an emotion that responds to society's 'disapproval of the offender': that is, certain groups and individuals are marked off as 'abnormal' – they look different from others, possibly through deformities such as being mentally and physically handicapped, and are socially ostracised and disapproved of (Nussbaum, 2004:174-5). Put differently, shame is 'potentially linked to denigrating others' (*ibid*, 2004:209). For instance, during apartheid South Africa the 'ideal' race of white people was closely aligned with the disparagement and hatred of black people, who were depicted as shameful, degraded and humiliated and consequently denied the franchise. A politics of humanity aims to protect citizens from shame because it refuses 'to take part in actively stigmatising ... vulnerable people and groups' and is committed to protecting the vulnerable against discrimination (Nussbaum, 2004:282-90).

While some forms of shame can be positive – shaming a corrupt politician is a way of disapproving of their offence, for instance – to shame a person because of their religion, sexuality or disability does not gain society's 'approval' and is in fact a constructive form of exclusion of the other. Similarly, to shame a student just because they come from an economically disadvantaged community is in fact to stigmatise others with the intention of excluding them from the pedagogical process. This brings me to a discussion of what it means to be a teacher who does not practise disgust and shame.

### **A teacher who hides from disgust and shame**

I articulate my argument as follows: a teacher who engages others and does not stigmatise them will create opportunities to engage learners. Now, after a cursory glance at the Department of Education's (2011) 'minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications', in particular the basic competences of a 'beginner' teacher, the following competences for newly qualified teachers are identified:

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- a sound subject knowledge
  - knowledge of how to teach subjects
  - knowing their learners and how they learn
  - knowing how to communicate effectively
  - possession of highly developed literacy, numeracy and information technology skills
  - being knowledgeable about the school curriculum
  - understanding diversity
  - being able to manage classrooms
  - being capable of assessing learners reliably
  - having a positive work ethic and displaying appropriate values
  - being able to reflect critically with their professional community.
- (Department of Education, 2011:56)

My interest is in the beginner teacher's competence to 'display appropriate values'. Taking into account that some beginner teachers' weaknesses include the application of poor teaching methodology and planning, a lack of experience, an inability to control large classes, a preoccupation with rights and labour issues and laziness (Arends and Phurutse, 2009:34), it seems hardly likely that the 'appropriate values' referred to by the Department of Education relate to the broader issues of undermining disgust and shame. I want to show how repudiating disgust and shame can offer possibilities for beginner teachers to exhibit appropriate values and, at the same time, address some of the weaknesses mentioned earlier.

Firstly, a teacher only gains experience through teaching, which implies that they ought to repudiate ills such as laziness, bad planning and inadequate teaching methodologies. What follows is that unlike disgust – which disconnects one from others – and shame – which stigmatises one – a politics of humanity requires teachers to become active and engaged beings. In doing so, they acquire experience in choosing appropriate teaching methodologies and constructively planning their teaching. By moving away from disgust and shame, a teacher actually commits themselves to others – that is, to colleagues and learners – and invariably improves on their teaching approaches and lesson planning. Likewise, a teacher who resents shame isolates themselves also from activities that can be shameful, such as not planning their lessons, not selecting appropriate teaching methodologies, not marking learners' tasks, not giving feedback to learners on tests and not doing prac-

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tical work. These shameful acts will always disconnect teachers from learners, and staying away from what is shameful is in fact to enact one's humanity.

Secondly, if some teachers hope to address their inability to cope with large classes they become intent on including learners in pedagogical activities without shaming them – that is, without stigmatising learners for occasionally achieving inadequate performances and, perhaps, test scores. Instead, learners are encouraged, motivated and supported to do well, allowing trust to develop amongst teachers and learners which can contribute towards more favourable pedagogical moments. By not showing disgust towards learners for poor performances, the learners are spared experiencing humiliation and undignified pedagogical moments, which augurs well for learning and, eventually, for teachers' control and management of large classes. The issue of learner indiscipline would also be minimised, since disruption and rowdiness often happen as a consequence of learners' exclusion, albeit voluntary, from pedagogical activities.

Thirdly, the claim that beginner teachers are more concerned with rights and labour issues is perhaps not as debilitating as it might at first seem. For beginner teachers to be concerned about rights and obligations would be apposite to treating learners and colleagues with dignity and respect. Together with the learners they can become co-participants in teaching and learning processes. This would entail neither teachers nor learners showing anger and resentment towards each other and, in turn, not embarrassing and humiliating each other in the school. In a way, both teachers' and learners' professionalism would be enhanced if they shied away from treating one another with disgust and shame. Showing disgust towards a learner will invariably exclude them from learning – for example by dismissing learners from classrooms. Similarly, shaming learners, such as by insulting and humiliating them in front of their peers, would undermine their confidence and their enthusiasm for learning. Furthermore, teachers act together with learners, if we consider that they should expect to learn with the learners and from them, and they should feel less threatened when they sometimes need to admit that they do not know or understand everything. In this way, teaching itself becomes a form of learning anew with others, where the teacher acts as listener, questioner, instructor, guide and responsible and caring leader and shows a sense of moral maturity and refinement. Only then will learners feel able to make mistakes or offer ideas that might appear muddled or confusing.



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Through their actions, teachers accept as conditional that classroom practices are meant to explore and construct, and make allowance for erring. In this regard I agree with Burbules (1997:73), who makes the point that our attitudes as teachers should include acceptance as a condition of exploration and discovery, with the occasional state of being lost, confused and unsettled. When teachers do not align themselves with such attitudes, the possibility of disrespecting and therefore shaming learners becomes highly likely, because shame would find making mistakes suitably reprehensible. However, when learners and teachers disconnect themselves from disgust, constructive interaction amongst them becomes likely and the possibility for disagreement quite acceptable, as the learners are not prevented from exercising critical reflection and imagination regarding pedagogical matters.

Fourthly, laziness, such as teachers arriving late, leaving school early or exhibiting regular absenteeism, would undermine the pedagogical process. While we have to show disgust at teachers who do not fulfil their obligations towards the school community, especially towards the learners, overextending our disgust towards them would further alienate some teachers and might cause their malpractices to worsen. Similarly, while shaming learners might be necessary at times, such as when they play truant, the shaming should not be extravagant else the learners will become too disaffected and give up on their schooling altogether. Here I am thinking specifically of authoritarian principals who treat learners too harshly for misdemeanours that perhaps are not terribly serious. For instance, expelling a learner for playing truant, which perhaps is not such a serious offence as, say, violently assaulting another learner at school. And if teachers can find ways to include learners, act in their best interests and make them feel that they belong, it would be far removed from shaming and treating them with disgust.

Fifthly, resenting disgust and shame could go some way in dealing with violence in and beyond schools. I am thinking specifically of those in poor communities that are marred by gangsterism and drug abuse. We find that gangsters roaming the school premises, intimidating learners and even insulting teachers frequently has violent and occasionally catastrophic consequences, such as a learner being stabbed or violently assaulted in the school playground. What the politics of humanity demands is for us not to react violently towards aggressors, since that would lead to further recriminations and even revenge attacks – as is often the case. The offender should be engaged, even if it means curbing one's hatred and dissatisfaction with them. Trying to avoid disgust and shame would therefore go some way to addressing violence in schools, as it would allow for potential dialogue.

## **Conclusion: Towards an extension of democratic citizenship education**

Thus far I have argued that teacher education that encourages the teaching and learning of values that are incommensurate with disgust and shame could foster certain competences required by beginner teachers in the new South Africa, and simultaneously assist them to minimise and curb their pedagogical weaknesses. However, such a politics of humanity would be incomplete if not lived in conjunction with a radicalised democratic citizenship education agenda. Perhaps it is in this area of democratic citizenship education that the newly promulgated minimum competences for beginner teachers fall short. The beginner teacher is supposed to be critical, yet the policy does not pay adequate attention to this competence. Democratic citizenship education can contribute towards enhancing the critical competence of a beginner teacher and a politics of humanity can be extended.

The policy on teacher competence is fairly vague when it suggests that teachers should be critical. Considering the expectations and demands of our new democracy, teaching teachers to be democratic citizens is one way to contribute towards building a post-apartheid society. Why? When teachers are initiated into discourses of deliberation and iteration – that is, taught to listen to others, dispute with others and offer points of view that will enable others to adjust their own points of view – they will learn what it means to be critical. And initiating them into a discourse of democratic citizenship implies that teachers will be taught what it means to connect with learners hospitably, and thus create more opportunities in pedagogical activities for learners to take more risks and to do the unexpected. Galston (1991:221-4) aptly posits that democratic citizenship education is constituted by four types of civic virtues:

- general virtues: courage, being law-abiding and loyal
- social virtues: independence and open-mindedness
- economic virtues: work ethic, capacity to delay self-gratification, adaptability to economic and technological change
- political virtues: capacity to discern and respect the rights of others, willingness to demand only what can be paid for, ability to evaluate the performance of those in office, willingness to engage in public discourse.

Many of these virtues are to be required by beginner teachers – particularly the ability and willingness to question pedagogical authority and engage in public discourse about matters of teaching and teacher education policy –

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since they are precisely what is required to enact deliberation. It is for this reason that Kymlicka (2002:293) cogently claims that a deliberative model of citizenship requires people (teachers) to act with a profound sense of deliberation:

Democratic citizens [including teachers] must be not only active and participatory, critical of authority, and non-dogmatic, but also committed to seek mutual understanding through deliberation rather than exclusively seeking personal benefit through bargaining and threats. Without citizens [and teachers] who display these virtues, liberal democracy cannot fulfil its promise of justice, and may indeed slowly succumb to undemocratic or illiberal forces.

The upshot of this is that democratic citizenship education will engender opportunities for engagement with the other – an avenue for becoming critical. Given that a politics of humanity creates possibilities for teachers to engage with others and to connect with them – and that democratic citizenship education frames the nature of teachers' deliberations with colleagues and learners – the hospitable relations that might emanate would be non-hostile, non-aggressive, non-humiliating and non-embarrassing. Only then would the teaching profession be contributing worthily to the cultivation of humaneness – an aspect that would enhance the critical competence of beginner teachers.

I started this chapter with a suggestion that hopeful teacher education in South Africa can be engendered through a politics of humanity, and that such a politics would extend the deliberative discourses offered to democratic citizenship education. Whereas a democratic citizenship education discourse can cultivate competent teachers who can engender a critical spirit in and through pedagogical activities, a politics of humanity can frame such teacher competences along the lines of what it means to be human – that is, initiating teachers into practices that resist disgust and shame. Such teacher education practices would then provide hope for the transformation of education in South Africa.

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